622 the post, by the law of 1895, unless he is owner of at least ten feddans. His appointment is usually preceded by rivalries which may turn into brawls, and followed by feuds that often end in death.

The *omda*, however, knows very well how to protect and even avenge himself, for he alone transmits information to the *maamûr*, and has sole charge of twenty or more night-watchmen (*ghaffirs*). Indeed, his chief duty is to ensure public security in the village and the surrounding country rather than to concern himself with improvements or with public health, to which he gives no more thought than those under him.

He represents his village district (*nahya*) before the *maamûr*, is responsible for any crimes committed in it which are reported, supports the *sarraf* in the business of tax-collecting, sees to the levy of men required for any given task, takes charge of the post and telephone, controls the carrying of arms, reports the outbreak of disease among people or cattle, and records births and deaths.

622 692 624 He is not paid by the Government, but apart from the value of the prestige attaching to his office, he has various privileges. He is exempt from taxation on five feddans, from forced labour, and from military service. This applies both to himself and to his sons. By custom, if not by right, the position of *omda* remains the privilege of one family. If the village is large and important, the *omda* is assisted by sheikhs, with whom he deliberates before giving his decisions. One of my pupils, the son of an *omda* in Upper Egypt, describes the procedure as follows: 'My father has 25 *ghaffirs* under his orders. From 5 p.m. to 5 a.m. they are on watch in the fields, with the exception of two who 622 692 remain on guard at the *omda's* house. If there is a trial, it is conducted thus: The *omda* sits down in his *montaza*, 675 or outer garden, with a few sheikhs (men of some age and responsibility). The two disputants appear, and each gives his explanation of the matter. The *omda* gives his judgment, and tries to reconcile them. If they are not con- [681] tent to abide by his decision, he locks them up in jail until the following day and then sends them to the *markaz* with two *ghaffirs*.'

622 692 An *omda* may imprison for 24 hours, and impose a fine up to 15 piastres. There is no town-hall in the village. The

FOLK MEDICINE IN MODERN EGYPT

XXIV

THE CHANGELING (MABDŪL)

996 855 695 783 Some people say that a child is sometimes a changeling, that is, that the Jinn have substituted it for another, and for this they have two "remedies." In the Buḥaira Province, and its neighbourhood, they put the child, about sunset, inside an oven which has no fire underneath, and close the door tightly, and leave it there until the morning. When they abandon it they say," God is between us and you; give *us our* son and take *your own*."

But in Gīza and Benī Suēf, and the surrounding districts, in place of the oven they choose an abandoned tomb, in which no dead person has been buried during a year at least.

These are the two savage methods followed. Often the child dies for want of breath inside the oven, or the tomb; or else some dangerous accident may lead to its destruction.

XXV

[p. 51] "THE FATHER OF FEATHERS" (ABŪ RĪSH)

"Oh, Father of Feathers, please God, you will live."
(Yā Abū rīsh in shāllāh ta'īsh).

842 751 If a woman have one child only, and whenever she has another boy or girl it dies, she immediately invokes the aid of an "old wife," one of the sorceresses, who bids her dress the child, who she fears will die, in a great peaked cap,[1] decorated with feathers from a goose or common hen or turkey, and to gird it with a black shawl, and thereafter set it on a black she-ass, with its back to the front. Then the boys and girls of the village, or city,[2] gather round him, and call out with one voice, *"Oh, Father of feathers, please God, you will live!"* They go round the village in this way three times, or even four to make quite sure.

[1] [*Tarṭūr*, like a dunce's cap.]
[2] [I have seen such a procession in Cairo near the Citadel. Tr.]